Diversity Practicum Capstone Paper

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I observed the BLAST program at Prairie Rose Elementary School in south Bismarck. I am one of four leaders of forty students ages five to eleven. The vast majority of students are third grade or below. Although there are older students, they attend BLAST less often, but I find I interact with that age range easily. This is helpful to know because I plan on teaching middle school and they are about at the age of middle school students.

The demographics of the program is not as diverse as other schools in the Bismarck area, but I have found diversity in different ways beyond the typical ethnicity and socioeconomic areas. There are more boys than girls in the program, but the difference is not dramatic. Most of the families are middle class. I was at a different school last year for the BLAST program so I am kind of bringing together my observations from both schools. Solheim Elementary School had more diversity due to ethnicity and socioeconomic backgrounds. It is amazing to see how the school’s location can bring in diversity, even though the schools are only a few miles apart. Solheim Elementary is located near a trailer court as well as fancy river homes, so there is a definite diversity in socioeconomic backgrounds. School location has a big factor in diversity. I will need to remember this in the future as an educator. There will be a large difference between a small, rural school and a school such as Bismarck High School. As a teacher, I will have to account for that in my classroom wherever I find a teaching position.

One example of diversity I witnessed in the school was students with a range of disabilities. Some students in the BLAST program have cognitive limitations. Some have minor physical disabilities. Since this is an after-school program, parents with children with severe cognitive or physical limitations may choose not to enroll their child in the program. The program is, I feel, not a good fit for students with major limitations. Some students cannot handle the social interactions and physicality of the program. It is a lot of playing and socializing with other students.

I observed one child who has some issues with socializing with peers. He generally plays with just the leaders and other students avoid him. He must be reminded many times to follow directions, but it is difficult to punish him because he does not know what he is doing in unacceptable. He freely speaks his mind to other students and uses unacceptable language. Physical limitations can be very difficult to work around in the program, because most days are spent playing running games such as tag. I only observed minor physical limitations in the program. The student participated in all physical games, but lacked strong hand eye coordination. This made the games difficult, but the student had a good attitude and still had fun.

There were no environmental adaptions needed in the program, but there were instructional adaptions made by leaders. As it is not a classroom setting, we cannot adapt our lesson plans, but we adapt our way of giving directions, discipline, and planning. We plan activities every day. We take all students into account when planning crafts and activities. The older students do not like doing crafts at all, but the kindergarteners love them. The younger students sometimes struggle with the crafts. The diversity in ages is something we have to take into consideration with all activites.

Discipline is another adaption in the program. At BLAST, we “write” children up for bad behavior. If a student is written up three times in one day they are sent home for a day. A few students in the program would be written up every day for unacceptable language and not following directions right away. It is impossible to write them up every day because the students do not know what they are doing or that it is wrong. It is important that we talk to them and explain their actions and repercussions. Time outs are more consequential than write ups. Some parents are very concerned when their child gets written up, while other parents blame the program and leaders for it. For those children, it is important to teach them why their behavior is wrong, because parents do not care.

Seating charts and repeated directions are instructional adaptions we have utilized. Some students are placed closer to the leaders table, so they can be reminded to eat their snack and read quietly. The seating chart takes away major distractions, like friends. This helps with classroom management, but it also helps students concentrate on homework and reading. Repeating directions and one on one directions are very helpful. Most of the time, we give directions to all of the students at once, but a few students need individual directions and reminders of what they are supposed to be doing. This will occur in classrooms. Some students like visual directions because they are visual learners. Some students will need reminders to stay on task or strategies to help them stay on task. I have learned about this in classes, but this was the first time I had seen it in action.

The BLAST program has diversity depending on the school. Solheim Elementary was more diverse than Prairie Rose, yet they are only a short distance away from each other. Throughout this diversity practicum, I have learned that there are more ways to be diverse than just socioeconomic and ethnicity. Each student is very different and brings a different dynamic to the classroom or in the case, program. I observed students with different cognitive and physical limitations. Parent situations are also very diverse. This is something I have really noticed this year as well. It is something that I will need to be aware of in my future classroom. The home lives of students can greatly impact learning. From the observations, I will take away the need to be knowledgeable on my future student’s situations and home life. I need to be able to help them put strategies into place that will work for them. I cannot do that if I am not aware. Diversity does not come in one form. It can be found in any classroom, in multiple ways. I am excited for the future to see how I can adapt to diversity in my classroom to ensure every student a safe learning environment.

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